

Confor response to House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee inquiry on invasive species

Confor is the not-for-profit organisation for sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses in the UK. We have more than 1,500 member companies representing the whole forestry and wood supply chain. Confor focuses on the strategic issues that are vital to the success and sustainable future of the sector. These include helping to build the market for wood and forest products, creating a supportive policy environment and helping members to become more competitive and successful.

How well is the UK and its overseas territories managing the impact of invasive species and controlling the risks of further invasion?

Confor is only in a position to comment on the UK, not overseas territories.

The UK is struggling to manage the impact of invasive woodland species, because of a lack of management in native broadleaf woodlands:

- **Herbivores:** The cost of controlling the damage to trees done by invasive herbivores such as Grey squirrel and non-native deer, outweigh the potential income to be derived from timber production. A recent survey of Royal Forestry Society members showed that they consider Grey squirrels the greatest threat to broadleaf timber production in the UK.¹ Confor supports the UK Squirrel Accord's submission to this consultation, which provides more detailed information on this subject.
- **Plants:** Although regulation and some grant funding is available, there is little financial benefit to the owner for tackling invasive plants such as *Rhododendron ponticum*, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, Giant hogweed, Skunk cabbage and *Allium triquetrum*, so tackling them detracts rather than supporting more holistic woodland management.
- **Invertebrates, fungi and disease:** Unmanaged woodlands are potential breeding grounds for invasive pests and pathogens such as Asian longhorned beetle, Ash dieback and *Xylella fastidiosa* which, if allowed to establish and spread, could cause widespread damage to UK crops and ecosystems.

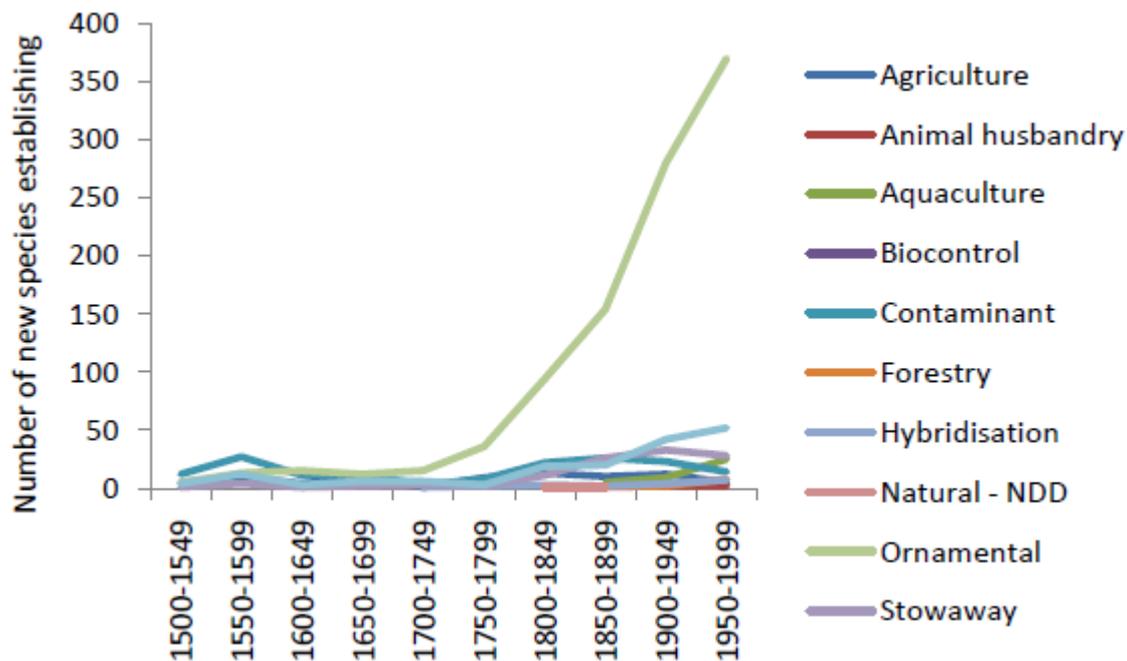
Alongside bringing woodland into appropriate thinning and harvesting regimes, tackling invasive species is the most pressing need in UK native woodland management. The market is unable to provide income to landowners for this work, which should form part of an integrated, funded strategy for bringing native woodland into good condition.

The UK is also vulnerable to further invasion from new non-native species. Confor recommends a ban on imports of firewood and of plants in pots, which are the two highest-risk imports for non-natives. As the graph below shows, ornamental imports especially for horticulture are the biggest source of

¹ Royal Forestry Society, [Grey shadow over our woodlands](#)



invasives. These restrictions would also benefit the UK firewood and horticulture industries; in the case of the former this would also help to incentivise woodland management.



Number of established non-native species arriving in Great Britain through different pathways, against date of first record.²

Of those that are already in the UK, which invasive species are posing the greatest harm to:

- a. human health;**
- b. animal health;**
- c. plant health and biodiversity.**

Grey Squirrel; Sika, Muntjac and Chinese water deer; Oak processionary moth, *Rhododendron ponticum*; Himalayan balsam; Japanese knotweed; Giant hogweed.

What are the risks of invasive non-native species migrating to the UK from future climate change?

The risks are very severe. The rate of INNS introduction is increasing, and this is certainly in part due to the warming climate

What actions should the UK take to mitigate the risk, or adapt to, climate migrations of invasive species?

² Helen Roy, et. al. Non-Native Species in Great Britain: establishment, detection and reporting to inform effective decision making. (NNSIP 2012). p.34.

The policies recommended in Confor's Plant Health policy paper should be implemented, in particular a ban on imports of firewood and plants in pots. The full policy can be accessed at: <https://www.confor.org.uk/media/246818/plant-health-and-brexit-statement-jan18.pdf>

Responsibility for biosecurity at the UK's ports is badly under-resourced at present: this should be strengthened as a matter of priority.

The invertebrate charity Buglife has a useful list of measures at: <https://www.buglife.org.uk/blog/hivemind/post-brexit-measures-to-combat-invasive-non-native-species>

Where should the four nations prioritise resources to tackle invasive species?

1. Funded strategies for woodland management
2. Research providing better information on risky imports, to enable better targeting of inspections.

How can the risk of trade and future trading relationships bringing non-native invasive species to the UK be mitigated?

Through identifying, inspecting and restricting the most dangerous imports.

The UK must maintain a relationship with Europe which enables us to share research and intelligence on INNS quickly and clearly.

How effective have the European Union's Invasive Alien Species Regulations been at addressing and tackling invasive species?

They have been entirely ineffective at controlling the biggest impact on the UK's native woodlands, from Grey squirrel and non-native deer.

In the event of EU exit, how should the UK establish its replacement for the European Commission's scientific forum to update the species list of concern?

No answer.

How should the UK work with the European Commission and others internationally to reduce the risk of invasive species?

The UK should continue to work closely with them to share best practice and knowledge.

Eleanor Harris

01 May 2019